



# **Relative Experience North East Pilot**

## **Final Evaluation report**

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**Dr Roland Marden and Rebecca Bellew**  
**Policy and Research Team, Coram**

### Executive summary

This final report represents findings of an independent evaluation of the Relative Experience North East pilot kinship carer support programme, delivered by Grandparents Plus, Family Lives and the Family and Childcare Trust and funded by the Silver Dreams Fund administered by the Big Lottery Fund. Relative Experience was designed to trial a peer-led model of delivering support for kinship carers and to raise public and practitioner awareness of the needs of older people who are kinship carers.

The three delivery partners received £196,500 to fund the project from September 2012 to February 2014. Coram was commissioned in October 2012 as the evaluation partner.

This report examines the pilot's performance over the 17 months of the project, considering development of the peer support model, implementation and delivery. The report also considers evidence regarding outcomes and impact produced.

### Key Findings

Relative Experience was successful in establishing a peer-led model of support for kinship carers. Reports from beneficiaries and volunteers suggested that the programme was able to draw on capacity from within the community to deliver valuable support to kinship carers. The peer-led model and the use of informal befriending was an effective approach to work with kinship carers, a group that are often isolated and distrustful of conventional social services. Evidence suggested that kinship carers responded well to the support offered, valuing the emotional support and the opportunity to take time away from their responsibilities to talk about issues. Kinship carers were receptive to the empathy and support offered by the 'friendship' element of the relationship as well as appreciating the more challenging element presented by the support provided. The unique character of befriending support encouraged kinship carers to think creatively about their situation and identify solutions within a supportive and non-threatening environment. Relative Experience befriending had particular efficacy in building kinship carer's self confidence and reducing levels of anxiety.

The project achieved the following key outcomes:

- The project had a positive effect on kinship carers' mental well-being and self confidence about their ability to cope.
- Volunteers found the experience challenging but highly rewarding, gaining personal satisfaction from helping kinship carers.

### Detailed Findings

#### *Kinship carers*

- The transfer of children from birth parents to kinship carers beneficiaries had occurred usually because disruption in the home caused by drug and alcohol addiction (55%), risk of abuse or violence (18%) or neglect (18%).
- Kinship carers typically experienced heightened social isolation when taking on caring responsibilities, with some having to give up work and many losing friendship networks.
- Kinship carer beneficiaries exhibited high levels of dissatisfaction about their personal situation when registering for befriending:
  - Very low levels of satisfaction regarding their life situation.
  - Low well-being with particular vulnerability to stress, low ability to cope and pessimism about their situation.

#### *Outcomes*

- Data from kinship carer beneficiaries suggested improvement in emotional stability and ability to cope :
  - Nine out of 10 kinship carers achieved improvement on their identified personal or family concern.
  - Kinship carers achieved an average 23% improvement on their identified personal or family concern.
  - Three quarters of kinship carers recorded an improvement in overall life satisfaction.
  - Kinship carers experienced a 12% average increase in life satisfaction.
  - Two thirds of kinship carers recorded an improvement in 'thinking clearly'.
  - Kinship carers experienced 10% average increase in ability to 'think clearly'.
  - Improved sense of ability to cope with parenting challenges.
  - Reduction in anxiety and stress levels.

#### *Implementation*

- Referral relationships were successfully developed with Children's Centres, schools, and crisis support services as well as Grandparent support networks.
- Intensive training and on-going support was needed to develop kinship carers as befriending volunteers.

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- Required checks on volunteers took a considerable amount of time and contributed to unanticipated delays in starting befriending.

### ***Conclusions***

- Relative Experience trained 17 volunteers, 11 of which started befriending and delivered a total of 141 befriending sessions to 19 kinship carers.
- Evidence suggests the model showed particular effectiveness in outcomes related to the emotional well-being and social isolation of kinship carers.
- Kinship carers and other older people with experience of caring proved capable of providing high quality support to peers with tailored support.